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PP RUEHAG RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV

DE RUEHAA #0502 1131136

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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0649

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/22/2018

TAGS: PGOV ECON SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: YOUNG ECONOMIST SPECULATES ON
FUTURE REFORMS, CHANGE NEEDED

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4 (B), (D).

¶1. (C) On a plane to Istanbul on April 5, EconOff sat next to Nury Meredov (strictly protect), a former economic advisor employed on a contractual basis at Turkmenistan's Embassy in Washington. Meredov was on his way to Malaysia to participate in a Government of Malaysia-sponsored, two-week seminar on "information technology in economic development" with other young government employees from Asia. Meredov is now an economic analyst in the Macroeconomic Policy Department at the Ministry of Economy and Development. He highly praised his alma mater, Western Illinois University -- where he completed a master's degree in Economics -- for its status as a research university and for the assistantship opportunities presented to him as a result. At one point, Meredov criticized the Turkmen requirement that students should have three years of professional work experience before applying for graduate school, calling it unnecessary. He was fully aware that his conversation partner was a U.S. Embassy employee. Meredov was pleased to have run into an American, and accepted her business card.

¶2. (C) Speaking about Turkmenistan's lack of accepted technical assistance from foreign countries, Meredov said that he believed that Turkmenistan would eventually accept more assistance, because "it's necessary for development" of the country. He said that he liked the Kazakhstan model, citing it as a potential example that Turkmenistan could follow in its economic evolution.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Young Turkmen may be feeling less heat from authorities about interactions with foreigners, since not only did Meredov accept EconOff's business card, but he also directly criticized some of his government's policies and addressed the lack of partnership with many countries. However, it's also obvious from the topic of his seminar and his destination that Turkmenistan is accepting technical assistance. Malaysia has reason to offer Turkmenistan assistance -- namely Petronas' growing involvement in

Turkmenistan's hydrocarbon sector -- and is one of those countries which, despite its lack of a diplomatic presence in Ashgabat, seems to be pursuing an active relationship with Turkmenistan. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND